



**Connecticut Education  
Association**

**Governance**

Philip Apruzzese, President  
Sheila Cohen, Vice President  
Cheryl Prevost, Secretary  
Jeff Leake, Treasurer  
Rae Baczek, NEA Director  
Maureen Honan, NEA Director

**Executive Office**

Dr. John Yrchik  
Executive Director

**Policy & Professional Practice**

Mary Loftus Levine, Director  
Capitol Place, Suite 500  
21 Oak Street  
Hartford, CT 06106-8001  
860-525-5641, 800-842-4316  
Fax: 860-725-6328  
[www.cea.org](http://www.cea.org)

Affiliated with the  
National Education  
Association

**Remarks of Dr. Linette Branham  
Education Issues Specialist  
Connecticut Education Association**

**Before the Education Committee  
Raised Bill 939  
An Act Concerning Education Certification**

**March 16, 2009**

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey and Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee.

My name is Linette Branham, and I'm an Education Issues Specialist for the Connecticut Education Association. I hold a PhD in curriculum and instruction, with expertise in how teachers transfer what they learn in professional development (PD) into classroom practice. I'm here today to share concerns about one provision in Raised Bill 939 that pertain to Continuing Education Units (CEUs) and professional development for teachers. This provision is connected to Raised Bill 6392, which came out of the Program Review and Investigations Committee, as a result of the PRIC study of certification. CEA provided extensive testimony on that bill, as well as alternatives to it, which I'll do here.

Among other things, Bill 939 would give the State Department of Education (SDE) unprecedented and unchecked authority over professional development in two ways: (1) it would allow them to determine the priorities and needs of students that professional development in districts would have to address; and (2) it would allow the SDE to unilaterally increase the number of CEU hours required for

certificate renewal from 90 to 150. Shifting such authority from the legislature to the State Department is counter-productive to improving professional development for teachers for several reasons, which I'll outline in my testimony.

One of the most important factors in creating change that positively impacts teaching and learning is the use of professional development for teachers. (In this testimony, 'teachers' refers to both classroom teachers and administrators, as the state recognizes these educators for certification purposes.) Effective professional development helps schools and districts develop capacity to change by, among other things, teaching educators how to use structures and processes to further change. There are five important characteristics of professional development that need to be aligned if it is to be effective.

The first characteristic is program coherence. Professional development activities should be connected in a comprehensive plan that links to district and school goals and school improvement efforts. This means that activities should be connected within each school, and among schools; at the same time, these connections need to be balanced with some degree of school autonomy so individual schools' needs can be met. Coherence includes building on what teachers already know, and encouraging communication among teachers who are striving to change instruction in similar ways. Building program coherence is better served by actively engaging teachers in identifying their own professional development needs, and discussing how they can best meet those needs, not by the State Department of Education determining PD priorities and needs.

The second characteristic is program content. Recent research has shown that the most effective PD is that which focuses on *what* teachers teach and *how* they teach it. Content-based PD that includes both of these foci has the greatest effect on teachers' knowledge and skills, and leads to changes in instructional practice. In one study, students of teachers who participated in PD of this nature performed well on assessments in the content area. Again, engaging teachers in discussing what their content-specific professional development needs are, and then supporting them in meeting those needs, is more effective than allowing the SDE to determine content-area PD needs and priorities.

The third characteristic is active learning, which works closely with the fourth characteristic, which is that PD is intensive and sustained over time. When teachers are actively engaged in PD, they learn collaboratively through a variety of learning experiences that meet their learning styles and learning objectives. When teachers work collaboratively, they are more likely to discuss concepts, skills, and problems related to teaching; to share curriculum and materials; and to sustain change over time. But working together isn't enough unless it occurs for a significant amount of time, and spans a longer period of time. When PD activities are longer in length and last, for example, over a full school year, teachers are more likely to have in-depth discussions about the content they teach, how students learn that content, teaching strategies for that content, what they tried in the classroom, and to get feedback on ideas. These are the strategies that promote and help sustain instructional change. Allowing the SDE to mandate more hours of professional development for certificate renewal won't necessarily lead to PD being more intensive and sustained over time; it simply requires that more hours are documented.

These four characteristics come together to help schools and districts build capacity when the fifth characteristic - active involvement of teachers - is added properly. We've all heard the adage "Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day.....teach a man to fish and he'll eat for a lifetime." That principle applies here. 'Actively' involving teachers in PD *activities* (workshops, study groups, research projects) isn't enough.....we need to go much further. If we want schools and districts to develop capacity to plan, implement, and evaluate professional development (one vehicle to impact instruction and increase student learning) teachers must be actively involved in those *processes* from start to finish.

Raised Bill 939 continues to use weak language that specifies that districts "determine specific professional development *activities* to be made available with the *advice and assistance* of the certified employees...." This is not strong enough to promote the sustained involvement of teachers in designing professional development that will build capacity for instructional improvement.

The bill also allows the State Department of Education to determine the priorities and needs of students that professional development in districts would have to address. Based on past

experience, we know that this has the potential to lead to 'one size fits all' professional development, mandates that don't necessarily meet the needs of the district, its students, and its teachers, and little, if any, involvement of teachers in the important processes of planning, implementing, and evaluating PD. Professional development determined by an outside source often results in PD being 'done to' teachers.

The third thing Raised Bill 939 would do that would have a negative impact on professional development is allow the SDE to increase the number of CEU hours required for renewal of a professional certificate from 90 to 150. When this idea was first presented to teachers and administrators, and the SDE was asked why they wanted to increase the number of CEU hours, the reply was that "other states are doing it." Research CEA conducted this winter indicates that states vary widely in their requirements for professional development and certification renewal. Three states don't tie PD to certification renewal at all, believing PD is a local district responsibility. Some states focus on teachers developing and implementing individual PD growth plans, not necessarily tied to a required number of hours. And other states follow CT's model of requiring clock hours of PD for certificate renewal. The truth is, there is no magic number of hours of PD that teachers should be engaged in to show they are continuously learning.....teachers learn and refine their craft on a regular basis.

The SDE also said they felt that, since teachers in some districts were already engaged in job-embedded professional learning, that time could easily 'count' toward an increased CEU requirement. That may be so in some districts, but in others it would not be as easy to implement. Some districts currently are hard pressed to offer their teachers the required 18 hours of professional development each year, and for others, the increase in paperwork to document an increased number of hours would be a nightmare.

In the fall of 2008, the SDE convened a group of stakeholders to review certification proposals from the SDE, including an increase in the number of CEUs required for certificate renewal. This group unanimously recommended to the SDE that the number of CEUs not be raised, and that, instead, districts focus on offering better quality for the 90 hours required. Yet, despite the

recommendation of a large cross-section of educators in the state, the SDE continues to push for this change.

What *do* we need in CT to help schools and districts build capacity for effective professional development? CEA believes four measures are necessary:

First, a state-wide task force on professional development should be convened to establish standards and guidelines for professional development. This group should consist of teachers and administrators *selected by their respective organizations* and representatives from the regional education service centers and the State Department of Education. Facilitated by an outside consultant, they should study the PD standards of the National Staff Development Council and other states, carefully review CT's current guidelines for professional development, and make revisions as needed to fit our needs.

Second, statutory language should *require* districts to establish professional development committees that actively include teachers in planning, implementing, and evaluating professional development. When the Education Enhancement Act was passed and implemented in 1986, and CEUs were introduced for certificate renewal, professional development committees were established in every district. The regional education service centers (RESCs) were instrumental in providing training to district staff in how to establish committees, write comprehensive PD plans, and plan and implement them. Teachers and administrators worked together to do this important work, and the results were impressive. Most, if not all districts, moved far away from "one-shot deals" and sit-and-get" workshops to intensive, sustained training for teachers. It wasn't perfect, but it was far better than a lot of the professional development that teachers face today. The SDE's role was to monitor implementation of professional development to assure that districts were providing what their plans outlined, and to provide resources to support districts. This is exactly what we need once again. Too many districts have left PD planning in the hands of one person, have planned PD based on the latest buzz-words (like data teams or data-driven decision-making), or still plan one-day sessions that teachers are required to attend and that have no connection to each other and don't encourage follow-up. This is, quite plainly, a waste of time and resources. Although our financial resources right now are lean, we have to seek every means of outside funding to support teachers and administrators in setting the structures and processes to plan on their own. We've learned much in the last 20 years about

what 'effective' professional development is, and know that encouraging collaborative work among teachers - not bringing in high-cost presenters for a day - works. We know how to have more effective professional development with less, but need to set structures in place to plan and implement it. Without such committees, planning professional development is often done on the fly, or by one person, with no clear understanding of what teachers really need. Taking this step would support the fifth critical characteristic of effective professional development - active involvement of teachers - needed to build capacity to impact instruction and learning.

The third thing we need is to have state resources - both financial and personnel - directed to helping districts provide training to teachers and administrators in how to plan, implement, and evaluate professional development. As in the past, much of this work can flow through the RESCs, whose staff have expertise in these areas. Providing training and technical assistance is akin to teaching a man to fish, thereby helping to build capacity.

Last, the SDE role in professional development should be statutorily shifted to providing oversight of district implementation of required professional development plans and resources to support districts as they develop capacity in this area. The state should not have the authority to dictate specific professional development or CEU content districts must provide or teachers should engage in, or to increase the number of CEUs needed for certificate renewal at will. Districts should have the responsibility to actively engage teachers and administrators in determining teachers' PD needs based on student learning, planning PD accordingly, and evaluating how that PD is implemented. By engaging in these processes, teachers will focus more intently on student learning needs and what they, themselves, need to learn in order to provide more effective instruction.

Raised Bill 939 falls far short of promoting best practice. Adding mandates leads to compliance with mandates; putting too much authority for orchestrating teacher learning in the hands of the State Department of Education opens the door to misuse and doesn't help districts build capacity. Teachers deserve more professional respect and support than this bill provides. I urge you to consider these factors seriously, vote no on Raised Bill 939, and help provide better structures for improving teacher professional learning.